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ABSTRACT

This issue of the NCRIEEO Tipsheet carries a thumb-nail sketch of Thomas F. Pettigrew's recent report, "A Study of School Integration." The author of this sketch attempts to translate, to explain, some of Pettigrew's findings. It is concluded that "Pettigrew's 'propositions' may be read as practical, sensible, and reputable guidelines for educators wrestling with the desegregation process at every level." Pettigrew's report is contended to have more than practical interest and to provide interesting data and theories on school desegregation. (Author/JW)

# DR. PETTIGREW HELPS CLEAR THE PICTURE \*

## NCRIEEO

### TIPSHEET # 2

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Dr. Thomas F. Pettigrew's "A Study of School Integration" may well become a monument on a road leading to the removal of another set of barricades between the excessively academic and the counterproductive practical. Pettigrew has lanced into the mad plexus of prejudice, desegregation and integration, associated with the ultimate national goal of successfully teaching children of all races in the same, not equal, school system, with a many-pronged pitchfork. This probe is finely tuned. Although some of his personal leanings peek around statistical corners, and there will be those who accuse him of selecting his areas of interest so that rationalizations loom more impressively to support what is obvious or suspected, he endeavors essentially to just probe and really offers no dogmatic conclusions. He even seems to avoid associating himself strongly with what his propositions suggest. Cynics of the new breed may harangue that Pettigrew should conclude his massive study with a personal socio-political position clearly established and proclaimed. He does not. He does establish that he is after basic truth and if towards the end of his probing campaign his propositions sound like things Uncle Remus could have told you, so what. Homilies strongly supported by sound empirical research and scholarly discipline may well be pieces of wisdom.

For one who insists upon perfect answers with which to face complex and imperfect probabilities this document may be a disappointment. Dr. Pettigrew steadfastly examines the data in hand and is not led into speculative all-inclusive or placating generalities. One must restrain the inclination to think of what he might have considered, or what "we" may have studied, to get appropriate insight into his "proposition." In the midst of such restraint it should be noted that the exhaustive collected data springs from widely separated geographic areas.

Dr. Pettigrew moves towards his stated objective system-



\* Pettigrew, Thomas F. A Study of School Integration, Final Report, BR-6-1775. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, Department of Social Relations, August 1970.

atically. Open-minded reading will give added insight to the student, and to the practitioner tangled in the national dilemma we call desegregation.

Having, with the use of space-age statistical methods, befuddled all but his few peers, and having semantically sneaked upon us average minds, and covered his unlikely retreat with dissertative wordage, he presents wisdom, nee non-assertive homilies, in the form of "seven interrelated propositions which receive verification as far as the data of this study can test them..."

### PROPOSITION

Proposition 1. Decision-makers in a county will reflect to some degree their county's white opinion climates in their attitudes.

Proposition 2. Decision-makers will make school desegregation decisions in varying degrees consistent with (a) their own views and (b) their perception of the opinion climate of their county.



Proposition 3. Following balance theory, sharp inconsistency between the decision-makers' actions and beliefs leads to intense strains to change their actions, or their beliefs, or simply "to leave the field" by resigning from the school board.



Proposition 4. Fear can upset balance theory predictions, causing a relatively pro-change decision-maker in a Black Belt County to resist racial change for fear of local pressure or a relatively anti-change decision-maker to assent to racial change for fear of federal power.

Proposition 5. The relationship between decision-makers' actions on educational desegregation and the white attitude climate will be highest for counties (a) close to the traditional racial norms of the Deep South, (b) with a relatively homogeneous white population, and (c) where racial attitudes are particularly salient for both white and Negro citizens.

Proposition 6. Extra-county pressures, such as court orders and threatened withdrawal of federal educational aid, is most critical for the traditional counties where they have significant influences on both the attitude climate and the process of public school desegregation. And any lessening of these pressures will lead to the greatest renewal of white resistance in these same traditional Black Belt Counties.

Proposition 7. Following the formulation of Aaronson and Carlsmith (1963), the amount of outside pressure used to induce the racial desegregation will determine the

degree of change in the white attitude climate. The more the force applied to achieve the change the less the attitude change; and, conversely, the less the force applied over the minimal requirement, the more the attitude change.



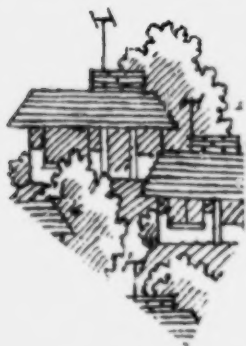
In the end Pettigrew says with a blandness that masks an enthusiasm one can still suspect, "These findings lead to tentative formulations of two middle-ranged theories. The one on the operation of attitude climates in the desegregation process was explicitly sought; the other on the attitude effects of dramatic events was an unexpected dividend of the project's research approach."

### TRANSLATION

Proposition Number 1. Means just what it appears to mean. Characteristically the word "county" is used twice for academic preciseness; it unfortunately leaves a potential escape hatch to an emotional bunker for the "city" or "state" thinker, or for the member of a large interracial club for that matter, who does not want to tactically make generalizations. Uncle Remus would have phrased it looser and said, "whatever happens anywhere, around here, the people with the power are given the power by the white population and decide the way they think most white people want...and such decisions stick."

Proposition Number 2. Aside from re-establishing that most decision-makers are part of the majority group, if not racially and/or socially than at least temporarily psychologically, Number 2 tends to be a rephrasing of Number 1.

Proposition Number 3. Means that if too much pressure is felt internally by the decision-makers and their personal life-styles mitigate against change, they are likely to quit. A judge who has a conflict of interest may pass the case on to another qualified jurist. Desegregation suffers when people to whom others look for decision and leadership leave the field. There is a danger, for example, when community leaders are driven to resign from the school boards. This is a well-known phenomenon to blacks; many liberals of the 1950's, and many bigots have discovered that their talents may be offered without undue emotional problems to programs for rescuing the horny-toed glabettle of Lower Kalihari and maintain enduring and satisfying relationships at home.



Proposition Number 4. Is an oblique extension of Number 3. Predictions of how a decision-maker will decide are subject to wide variance because of local or national pressures; it does not matter from what position the person started. Adlai Stevenson was correct, the intrusion of fear in a rational process is likely to make logical human action difficult and sometimes impossible. Scared people don't act sensible--everyone knows that.

Proposition Number 5. Is an academic restatement of propositions 1, 2, 3 and 4, with implications hinted at and referred back to the body of data gathered, without condemning anyone or any place. It is essentially a reminder that desegregation is no simple process.

Propositions Numbers 6 and 7. Distill down to saying that for successful desegregation the right amount of pressure must be applied--no more and no less; excesses and insufficiencies both trigger negative and destructive attitudes. This general "known" merits both validation and respect.



For the rest, presentation is more evident than the imperative pointing of direction. Pettigrew's insistence upon reiterating that the data relates to and springs from specific studies, specific places, specific factors, and specific research methods, may well be viewed as academic caution and integrity maintenance. The fact remains that generally applicable implications are clear. With minor grammatical changes Pettigrew's "propositions" may be read as practical, sensible and reputable guidelines for educators wrestling with the desegregation process at every level. What more should we ask of a researching scholar.

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